

EUPLOCAMUS VIEILLIOTI. The Fire-backed Pheasant.

A magnificent bird, common in Perak, particularly towards the north. While at Kwala Kangsar, I had them frequently brought in by the Malays, and kept several, both males and females, in my aviary for several months.

They did well in captivity, becoming tame, and feeding on boiled rice, plantains, jack-fruit, and Indian corn.

[To be continued.]

XLI.—*Ornithological Letters from the Pacific*.—VIII. *New Britain*. By OTTO FINSCH, Ph.D., C.M.Z.S., &c.

THE discovery of novelties by explorers must depend chiefly on what is already known of the country proposed to be explored. The traveller who has the good fortune to be the first in a new country will easily find new species. I visited a good many islands in the South Seas, of which the avifaunæ were little, if at all, known; but they were very poor, and yielded little more than sea-birds and widely distributed species. When I came to such a promising country as New Britain, I arrived too late. I do not complain; for the personality of the discoverer is immaterial to science, and the name of the Rev. George Brown will be known for ever as that of the first explorer of New Britain, New Ireland, and especially the Duke-of-York group, where, under his superintendence, the mission has existed since 1875. From the influence resulting from his post, and from the means he had to depend on, it was moreover easier for him than for any body else to make extensive collections. He had a lot of teachers at his command to collect for him on different spots in the country, and was himself able to visit the different stations, for which purpose a small steamer was provided. Thus mission work and collecting specimens were easily combined. Before Mr. Brown came, I believe, not more than a dozen birds were known from these islands. These were discovered by the French naturalists, and were chiefly from New Ireland. In accordance with this condition of things it was not surprising

that even the first collection of Mr. Brown contained 70 species, among which 10 proved to be new. This was in 1877; and science has to thank Dr. Sclater for their scientific determination. Since that time four more collections of birds have reached the hands of this learned naturalist, of which he has published accounts in his usual excellent style. All these collections raise the number of species sent home by Mr. Brown to 105, of which 80 belong to New Britain, 20 to New Ireland, and 5 to the Duke-of-York group. In this total number of 105 species, 23 were new, of which there were 13 from New Britain, 6 from New Ireland, and 4 from the Duke-of-York Islands. It is obvious therefore that subsequent collectors had only the gleanings left to them, and had only to add some well-known species to the list. So far as I could ascertain, from the birds obtained by Kleinschmidt, who collected for a space of about two years in Mioko (Duke-of-York group) for the Museum Godeffroy, I believe there are only about four species which escaped Mr. Brown, and which will turn out to be new when they come to be studied by an ornithologist in Europe. Among them is an Owl reminding one of *Strix tenebricosa*, a *Zosterops*, and a peculiar Reed-Warbler (apparently belonging to a new genus). That is very little; but New Britain is not rich in birds. So far as I can calculate, the whole number of species known from this island is 112, from the Duke-of-York group 39, and from New Ireland 42, making for the whole region, including New Hanover, 139. Among these species not a single peculiar form is found in New Britain; for the only peculiar genus, the interesting and most remarkable Columbine form *Ædirrhinus*, extends over the whole region. We must not, however, forget that only a few spots of New Britain have been touched, and that the greater part of its coasts and of the interior have never been visited by a naturalist or any white man. From these unexplored districts some novelties may be expected; but in my opinion they will not be many. The island is very narrow; the mountains are but of a moderate altitude; and, I think, the southern portion, where no one has ever collected, offers the best field, besides being closer

to the mainland of New Guinea and likely to receive some interesting forms from that quarter.

As regards myself, I was, unfortunately, not able to go there, nor to stay in New Ireland (the most promising country of the region), and was obliged to be satisfied with exploring a comparatively very small part of New Britain—that is, the shores of Blanche Bay and its environs. In this district I have been at work a little more than seven months, and successful enough out of 112 known species to obtain specimens of 102.

If I failed as regards birds, yet I was able to do a little more than Mr. Brown in ethnological researches, although I leave still much in this line to be done by my successors. To make observations on the habits and manners of animals is more difficult, perhaps, in the tropics than elsewhere, and requires, above all, plenty of time; and this is scarce for a naturalist who has to look out for many other things, and cannot devote all, or even the greater part of his time to ornithology. Thus it comes to pass that I cannot claim to know very much of the birds of New Britain, although I saw a good deal of them myself and was assisted by an experience of many years in studying birds in nature. As a general rule, observation in these dense primeval woods is rather difficult. The trees are so tall; their foliage, encumbered by climbers and parasitic plants, is so thick; and one has to look out for a path, if there is any, that one may not become entangled in troublesome tendrils or stumble over fallen trees and branches. Thus in many cases one does not get more than a glance at the feathered tribes. It is also difficult to see a bird sitting in the midst of a thick tree, and requires, in many cases, the sharp eye of a native as a helpmate for one's own powers of vision unaccustomed to such forests as these.

I cannot now go into details on the birds of New Britain, and confine myself to a brief sketch, hoping eventually to write a more complete article on the avifauna of this island. The woods are not silent, as is so often said in regard to the tropics, although only a few notes make them resound. I shall not try to give a description of these sounds,

as this is not possible; for they are so singular and do not show any resemblance to the voices of birds at home with which we are familiar. The most remarkable notes, however, are those of *Philemon cockerelli*, *Gracula krefftii*, *Calornis nitida* and another species of the same genus, *Monarcha alecto*, *Sauloprocta melaleuca*, *Halcyon sanctus*, *Corvus enca*, the *Centropi* (which resemble the bellowings of a bull), and of certain species of *Eclectus* and *Trichoglossus*, as well as of such Pigeons as *Œdirrhinus insolitus* and *Carpophaga rubicera*. The natives have distinctive names, not only for all the birds, but even for nearly all other vertebrates, and also for the larger beetles, butterflies, and spiders. Many of these names are euphonic and even good, such, for example, as "Kick," for *Halcyon sanctus*, "Käräräk" for *Dicrurus læmostictus*, "Kotkot" for *Corvus enca*, "Ka-uk" for *Eudynamis picatus*, "Gilian" for *Gracula krefftii*, and so on. Although there are many strange and sometimes not unmelodious voices, there is not a single singing bird which can be compared with any of ours at home. The *Nectariniæ* (*N. frenata* and *N. aspasia*) have a sort of short and slow song, of which that of the latter contains a note not unlike that of our *Sylvia garula*; but it has no strength or persistence. The best songster seems to be, perhaps, the little *Cisticola ruficeps*.

To proceed to a brief review of the species, and beginning with the birds of prey, there are nine diurnal and three nocturnal species of this group. Amongst the latter only one species (*Ninox odiosa*, Sel., which I consider to be nothing but an *Athene*) is peculiar to New Britain. I may also mention that I strongly suspect that what Dr. Selater has determined as "*Accipiter etorques*, Salvad.," will turn out to be a different and peculiar species, distinguished by the uniform plumbeous tail-feathers. This species and *Haliastur girrenera* are common birds of prey, all the others being very rare, and seen only occasionally. Of the very interesting *Henicopernis longicauda*, notwithstanding high rewards offered to the natives, I only got one example. I have also to add to the list *Falco melanogenys*, which, I think, Mr. Brown has not obtained.

Of Swifts there is one *Collocalia*, which I consider to be identical with *C. vanicorensis*, and the splendid widely distributed *Dendrochelidon mystacea*. This I consider to be one of the most elegant beings on wings that one can see anywhere. Of Swallows, of which Mr. Brown got none, I obtained two species, *Hirundo tahitica* and another species with a light-coloured rump, undoubtedly identical with an Australian species—I suppose, *H. nigricans*.

Of Kingfishers six species are known in this region, of which the magnificent *Halcyon albicilla* is apparently confined to the Duke-of-York group. What has been named "*Halcyon chloris*, Bodd.," will require a closer examination, as the New-Britain bird seems to be different. The same is needed as regards "*Eurystomus crassirostris*, Sel.;" for I find that neither the strong bill nor longer tail will stand as characters of specific value. There are only two *Nectariniæ* here, *N. frenata* and *N. aspasia*, both well-known and widely distributed species and common birds of the country. The interesting *Myzomela cineracea*, lately described by Dr. Selater, I got also; the male has a narrow red line along the chin. *Myzomela sclateri*, Forbes, seems to be peculiar to Credner Island, while *Philemon cockerelli* is the most common bird of the woods, living in small flocks, which are always noisy and uttering their melodious short call-notes. Of the new *Pœcilodryas æthiops*, Selater, I got the female and young bird, both quite differently coloured from the male. Is the *Pitta* indeed the true *P. mackloti*? All specimens in New Britain have invariably a blue line on the crown. Of Muscicapine birds *Sauloprocta melanoleuca* and *Monarcha alecto* have both peculiar and nice notes; the fine *M. verticalis*, Selater, is confined to the Duke-of-York group. To these must be added a *Myiagra* apparently near to *M. concinna* of Australia. *Artamus insignis*, Sel. (not from New Ireland, as at first stated by Mr. Brown), has been only obtained in Spacious Bay, New Britain, and is unknown the natives in Blanche Bay. Besides *Lalage karu*, which is a very common bird, there are two fine *Graucali*, *G. sclateri*, Salvad., and *G. sublineatus*, Sel.; for I think the *Graucalus papuensis* in Dr.

Sclater's first list of Mr. Brown's birds (P. Z. S. 1877, p. 101) must be identical with what he subsequently determined as *G. sclateri*. The only known *Dicrurus* (*D. lemostictus*, Sel.), a fine species, is peculiar to New Britain, as is also the wonderful *Dicranostreptus megarhynchus* to New Ireland. To the single species of *Calornis* (determined as *C. nitida*, Gray, by Dr. Sclater) I have to add a second, without prolonged middle tail-feathers, and with violet on the nape, back, and throat, and of the uniform metallic-green kind, which comes close to the common Javan species (I believe, *C. cantori*). Both species are very common, especially *C. nitida*, which nests in large colonies. *Gracula kreffti*, Sel., is one of the finest birds in the woods. The *Corvus* which Mr. Sharpe declares to be *C. enca*, seems to be not yet satisfactorily determined. It is a common bird, resembling in voice and manner our Crows, but remarkable for its fine blue eye. *Donacicola spectabilis*, Sel., is a very grass-loving Finch, and very common in suitable localities. *Buceros ruficollis* does not occur in Blanche Bay, or rather, I should say, not along the coast, but a little further inland, where it is said to be not at all rare.

Among the eight Cuckoos, not one is peculiar to New Britain. I have to add one species, a true *Cuculus*, very likely the eastern form of our *C. canorus*. *Eudynamis taitensis* is one of the few migratory birds. Of *Centropus ateralbus* (which is a very common species) albinos occur.

There are eight species of Parrots, of which two are peculiar, namely *Cacatua ophthalmica*, Sel., and *Loriculus tener*, Sel., the latter being confined to the Duke-of-York group, and in that group to a certain locality, of which only Mr. Brown is aware. Nevertheless the species may also occur on the coast of New Britain; but such little birds are very easily overlooked. This is not so much the case as regards *Nasiterna pusio*, as this small bird is often seen on the outside of the foliage, creeping along the branches and stems of trees. I obtained its egg; but all my endeavours to keep specimens alive were in vain. The question as regards *Eclectus polychlorus* and *E. linnaei* being male and female, has been settled long

ago, and does not need my evidence. I may state, however, that nestlings are coloured just the same as the old birds, only less brightly, and that in young males the iris is dark brown, instead of blood-red, and the bill black, spotted with yellow; while in the young females the eye is also dark brown, instead of pale yellowish, and the bill black, spotted with orange. The nestling of *Cacatua ophthalmica* wears the same colours as the old bird; long before the tail-feathers are fully grown the yellow pendent crest is developed in the same style as in its parents. As regards *Pionus heteroclitus*, I have little doubt that the blue-headed form is only the female and young male; for I have seen a yellow-headed specimen of which the head-feathers were mixed with blue. Of the two *Trichoglossi*, *T. massenæ* and *T. subplacens*, the latter is very common, but more easy to see than to obtain. I obtained examples of both species from Abgarris or Feads Island, to the east of New Ireland.

Next to the Parrots the Pigeons are the most numerous tribe as regards species: fourteen are known from New Britain; but only two are peculiar, namely *Carpophaga melanochroa*, Sel., and *Phlogænas johannæ*, Sel., the latter only found on Duke-of-York island, and not known to the natives here. The single specimen of *C. melanochroa* remains unique, no other specimen having been yet obtained. The same is the case as regards *Ptilopus rivolii*. Although Dr. Selater remarks "we have thus a better indication of the true patria of this fine Fruit-Pigeon than has yet been obtained," yet he was not able to say whether the specimen came from New Ireland or New Britain; and, what is worse, the question is still unsettled. Mr. Brown has in vain searched for another specimen, and does not now remember the first specimen and where it came from. *Carpophaga van-wycki* breeds in great numbers on Credner Island, but is rare on the mainland, where *C. rubricera* is very common during the ripe state of certain fruits. *Calenas nicobarica* is everywhere rare. The fine *Macropygia browni*, Sel., also occurs on the main coast, but is also rare. Besides this I got another species of *Macropygia*, which, from the black

bill, ought to be *M. nigrirostris*, Salvad.; but it may be *M. carlaretia*, Bp.; which, I am unable to make out here.

The little *Coturnix sinensis* and a species of *Turnix*, or *Hemipodius*, which seems not to be noticed in Dr. Selater's lists of Mr. Brown's collections, both breed here.

One of our most common birds is *Megapodius eremita*, the "Angiok" of the natives. Wherever one puts one's foot into the bush one will find their nesting-holes, sometimes leading steeply down at the base of a lava block or at the root of a tree, like the hole of a fox. At other times the egg is deposited half a foot deep in the lava sand, where the spot is easily discovered by the sharp eye of the native. Some localities seemed to be almost undermined by these birds. They seem to lay all the year round, except in the rainy months, when eggs are very rare and for a short time not to be had at all. A year and a half ago forty eggs could be bought from the natives for one stick of tobacco; now one gets only two. I got eggs of this bird also from the Solomons (island of Savo), from which two species (*M. brenchleyi*, Gray, and *M. brazieri*, Sel.) have been described. I cannot see any difference between the eggs from the Solomons and those obtained here, and doubt whether any oologist would be found able to distinguish the species of *Megapodii* from their eggs. Although *Megapodius eremita* is very common, one very seldom gets a sight of it. It runs very quickly through the jungle, or is seen only on wing for a moment among the foliage of the trees. The young ones, when hatched, are already able to fly. It is singular that among the numerous specimens (about forty) I got, there was not a single male bird; they were all females.

The Morrup (not Morruk), *Casuarinus bennetti*, I did not see at large. It does not live on the coast, but in the interior, on the more level and grassy plateau. Old birds are difficult to obtain, and are often mutilated by the natives, who break the first joints of the toes of one foot, to prevent them from striking. The rudimentary primaries are used by the natives as ornaments, and are worn in the pierced septum of the nose.

To the fourteen Waders known through Mr Brown's

researches (of which only *Rallus insignis*, Scl., seems to be peculiar) I have to add *Esacus magnirostris*, *Limosa melanuroides* and *L. uropygialis*, *Phalaropus angustirostris*, *Tringa minuta* and another species of *Tringa*, all temporary visitors to this country, besides *Ardea sinensis*. Of the *Porphyrio* I obtained only a young one, not sufficient to determine the species, which will, however, be a known one. Strange to say, I never observed *Streptopelia interpres*, although this bird, no doubt, also visits these shores. *Ardea sacra* is very rare.

Of the *Natatores* Mr. Brown sent home only *Sterna fuliginosa* and *Anous stolidus*; but I can add six species more, namely *Sterna bergii*, *S. longipennis*, *S. melanauchen*, *S. sinensis*, *Sula fusca*, and *Tachypetes aquilus*. I have never seen a *Gygis* nor a *Phaeton*, nor any member of the *Procellariidæ* here. Very strange is the absence of Ducks, especially of *Dendrocygna*; but it is likely they may occur in the interior or on the rivers in the southern portion of the island.

Matupi, New Britain.

March 1881.

XLII.—*More about Cypselus horus*, H. et F.

By T. SALVADORI, C.M.Z.S.

IN 1872 the Marquis Antinori and I jointly published a paper on *Cypselus horus*, H. et F.*, showing that the bird so named was not a variety of *C. affinis*, as von Heuglin† had thought, but a perfectly distinct species. We gave a full description of it, and pointed out the characteristics by which it may be distinguished from the allied species, *C. affinis*, J. E. Gr., and *C. cafer*, Licht. Quite recently Count Turati, of Milan, has sent me for inspection a *Cypselus* from Landana (Congo), collected by Dr. Lucan and M. Petit, and received through M. Bouvier. Although this specimen is not fully adult, it is quite evident, in my opinion, that it belongs to the same species as the specimen in the Turin Museum which

* Nota intorno al *Cypselus horus* (Atti R. Ac. Sc. Tor. viii. pp. 94-96).

† Orn. N.O.-Afr. i. p. 146.